



## Use Baldrige Education Criteria as a Framework for Improving Leadership Preparation Programs

By Mary A. Hooper

Across the country, states are in the midst of transforming requirements for the preparation and certification of school leaders. The implication for many colleges is that existing approaches to leadership preparation may no longer meet the expectations and requirements of the regulating agencies that function as critical stakeholders. To meet these changing requirements, departments in the business of preparing school leaders must re-examine their programs and approaches.

The *Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence* can be useful as a blueprint for not only assessing existing graduate-level leadership preparation programs in the context of changing customer requirements, but also for reinventing the design and delivery system of educational services. Applying the criteria necessitates an understanding of the components and how they relate to the integrated nature of a graduate-level leadership preparation program.

The *Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence* is organized around a framework of seven categories, which are broken down below. Each category represents a key organizational system and specifies requirements for what that system should look like.

### Leadership

This category examines how leaders guide and engage others in achieving organizational goals. Leadership has been shown to have significant affect on the other elements of the management system defined by the framework of the *Criteria for Performance Excellence*.<sup>1</sup> Visionary leadership, defined by the Baldrige criteria, is the setting and communicating of direction and creation of a learning-oriented organizational climate that is consistent with high expectations.<sup>2</sup> Visionary leadership also includes encouraging involvement, learning and development, and creative innovation by all staff.

The review of a leadership development department or program would not be complete without an extensive examination not only the program leadership system, but also of the extent to which program faculty members engage themselves in the work of strengthening K-12 leadership systems. As colleges and universities revisit their approaches to developing leaders, it is imperative they model effective leadership consistent with the principles and practices of quality management embedded in the *Education Criteria for Performance Excellence*.

### Strategic planning

This category focuses on how the organization plans. It sets an expectation that the strategy development process must synthesize the needs, expectations and requirements of students and stakeholders, taking into account internal and external factors. The refining and reinvention of graduate-level leadership programs should include development of clearly defined, results-focused goals that relate to the performance of graduates in K-12 leadership positions. Balancing internal requirements for scholarship with external standards for leadership certification remains a challenge for many institutions. Finding this balance and articulating goals that measure post-graduate performance require strong university-district partnerships.



### **Student, stakeholder and market focus**

The student, stakeholder and market focus category emphasizes the need to clarify the focus of the organization and to assess the extent to which stakeholders are satisfied with the performance of the school or district. As faculty engage in developing new courses and programs, information from various stakeholder groups related to needs, expectations and requirements for what leadership students should be learning must be considered.

A commitment to quality management requires an emphasis on the importance of identifying customers and, not only understanding and responding to their current requirements and needs, but also building long-term loyalty through a continual focus on increasing customer satisfaction.<sup>3</sup> Colleges must focus on developing and nurturing university-district partnerships that include a strong focus on understanding the district's leadership development needs. When these partnerships are based on mutual respect, program developers are able to leverage the contributions of scholars and current practitioners.

### **Measurement, analysis and knowledge management**

As the foundation of the criteria framework, the systems and processes of measurement, analysis and knowledge management provide a mechanism for aligned decision making and continual improvement at all levels of the organization. Continual improvement implies change, and change requires learning. From a systems perspective, feedback is the source of learning and is necessary for maintaining the equilibrium of the system. It is critical that educational departments build in systematic opportunities for feedback from K-12 leaders about the relevance and rigor of educational leadership programs.

### **Human resource focus**

The human resource focus category addresses the extent to which organizational systems enable all staff to develop and use their full potential in alignment with organizational objectives. The principles and theories implied in the human resources category address the design of work systems conducive to collaboration and participation in decision making, as well as organizational and personal learning. It is essential for higher education institutions to examine existing approaches to work load and expectations for promotion and tenure if they are committed to aligning faculty and staff efforts to the changing requirements for preparing school leaders.

The Baldrige criteria define organizational learning as learning embedded as a part of daily work that produces shared knowledge that is valued across all levels of the organization and with partner organizations. Such shared learning results in solving problems at their source with new and innovative approaches. It is the responsibility of leadership to create an environment conducive to learning. Leaders must ensure the provision of sustained opportunities for authentic learning and promote innovation, learning and knowledge sharing in all levels of the organization.<sup>4</sup>



## Process management

The requirements in the process management category focus attention on the design of processes not only within the context of innovation, but also from the standpoint of the core

value of agility. Effective processes are those that produce outputs that meet critical customer needs and are efficient in terms of time, resource use and cost.<sup>5</sup> The process management requirements indicate an expectation that process results be assessed and monitored by those individuals managing the processes, rather than by supervising managers or administrators. This compels staff to continually evaluate and improve its work processes to achieve greater productivity.

Innovation is important for improving operational processes. It seems logical that the ability to design innovative processes depends on a clear understanding of existing operational processes, and the requirements and expectations of customers. Key processes such as recruiting and admitting students, instructional delivery and assessment of student learning need to be systematically defined. Innovation also necessitates that all employees have the capacity for managing continual improvement of processes they lead.

## Organizational performance results

The organizational performance results category requires organizations to report a balanced composite of results that address the performance levels of key organizational systems and overall organizational performance. The requirements of this category are based on a systems perspective that frames the recognition that the overall results are impacted by the connections and interactions of all the elements of the organizational system.

The systems perspective on organizational performance requires that leaders monitor, respond to and manage performance using feedback driven by a rich system of measurement and analysis. A systems perspective also addresses managing knowledge and organizational learning to link continually improving key strategies to increase overall performance.

It is this systems perspective that drives the structure of the *Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence*. It is this systems perspective that will serve colleges and universities well as they strive to respond to the changing requirements for preparing school leaders.

## References

1. Barbara Flynn and Brooke Saladin, "Further Evidence on the Validity of the Theoretical Models Underlying the Baldrige Criteria," *Journal of Operations Management*, Vol. 19, 2001, pp. 617-652.
2. National Institute for Standards and Technology, *Education Criteria for Performance Excellence*, [www.quality.nist.gov/PDF\\_files/2009\\_2010\\_Education\\_Criteria.pdf](http://www.quality.nist.gov/PDF_files/2009_2010_Education_Criteria.pdf) (case sensitive).
3. J.R. Evans and W.M. Lindsay, *The Management and Control of Quality*, fifth edition, South-Western/Thomson Learning, 2002.



4. M.L. Blazey, K.S. Davison and J.P. Evans, *Insights to Performance Excellence in Education 2000: An Inside Look at the 2000 Baldrige Award Criteria for Education*, ASQ Quality Press, 2002.

5. P.B. Crosby, *Quality is Free: The Art of Making Quality Certain*, New American Library, 1979.

*Mary A. Hooper is an assistant professor of educational leadership at the University of West Georgia in Carrollton. She serves as the director of the West GA Leadership Academy, which functions to strengthen university-school district partnerships, and Hooper is the founding president of the Georgia Educational Faculty Association. She can be reached at [mhooper@westga.edu](mailto:mhooper@westga.edu).*